

Habitat Project Proposal

Proposal Title: Diagonal-Electric Sagebrush Improvement

Proposal Number: 659

DWR Region: Central Region

Lead Agency: USFS

County: Tooele

Project Manager: Renae Bragonje

PM Phone: 8014915653

Regional Priority: Within Focus Area

Project Type: Terrestrial Habitat

Proposed Start Date: 09/01/2008

Project Location: 4 miles southwest of Vernon, Utah

Project Description: Dixie harrowing 1,000 acres of big sagebrush to improve habitat for Mule deer and sage grouse

Description of Problem/Need: Sage-steppe and sage grouse habitat in the Vernon area is becoming increasingly degraded. Naturally occurring vegetative mosaics within the landscape have diminished due to fire suppression. The majority of the proposed area is a continuous sagebrush population consisting of a single age class (old and decadent). The understory component (grasses and forbs) of the habitat is also lacking.

Sage grouse populations in the area have decreased from their historical numbers. Sage grouse have been petitioned to be listed as an endangered species. The Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to list the species because of plans for habitat enhancement projects by working groups and government agencies. Members of the West Desert Adaptive Resource Management Working Group feel this would be an excellent project to help sage grouse in this area. The proposed project lies within one of the Utah Partners for Conservation and Development (UPCD) conservation focus areas. Sagebrush canopy cover is continuous with very few openings which could only be used by sage grouse for winter habitat. There is a need for more nesting and brood-rearing habitat. There is also a lack of forbs in the understory. Forbs are a major component of the sage grouse diet.

User-created roads/trails are common in the area and are impacting the vegetation and wildlife in the area.

The Landscape Natural Fire Regime Group is III- infrequent, mixed & surface (less than 75% of the dominant overstory vegetation replaced). The Fire Regime Condition Class is 2- Moderate. Fire regimes have been moderately altered from their natural (historical) range. Risk of losing key ecosystem components is moderate. Fire frequencies have departed from natural frequencies by one or more return intervals (either increased or decreased). This result in moderate changes to one or more of the following: fire size, intensity and severity, and landscape patterns. Vegetation and fuel attributes have been moderately altered from their natural (historical) range. There is potential for Wildland Urban Interface fires as homes are located within one mile of the proposed project area. The fire hazard potential for the area is mostly high with small areas of moderate based on the BLM statewide fire hazard potential.

Objectives: Reduce canopy cover of big sagebrush in treated areas to 5 to 10%. Increase openings and improve the understory. Establish perennial grasses, and forbs. Improve sage grouse brood rearing habitat.

Relevance to Strategic Plans: The project area occurs within the sagebrush steppe type which is one of the key habitats identified in the WAP. This area supports mule deer (Tier III) and Greater sage grouse (Tier II). Numerous other species of concern (Tier III) also inhabit the area including neotropical birds and raptors.

The proposed treatments lie within Central Region UPCD focus areas.

The proposed treatments will help address strategies outlined in the WDARM sage grouse conservation plan; Reduce the threat of conversion of sagebrush stands to invasive/noxious weed communities. Work with public and private partners to implement livestock management plans that address seasonal needs of sage-grouse and livestock operations. By 2016, increase brood-rearing habitat quality in the Resource Area.

The proposed projects will address some of the habitat management strategies outlined in the deer management plan for herd unit 19 (Vernon) including: continue to restore and improve sagebrush steppe habitats critical to deer according to DWR's Habitat Initiative; cooperate with federal land management agencies and private landowners in carrying out habitat improvements such as reseeds, controlled burns, water developments etc. on public and private lands; and maintain and/or enhance forage production through direct range improvements throughout the unit to achieve population management objectives.

The proposed projects will address the following goals and objectives of the Division of Wildlife Resources most recent strategic management plan:

Resource Goal: expand wildlife populations and conserve sensitive species by protecting and improving wildlife habitat.

Objective 1: protect existing wildlife habitat and improve 500,000 acres of critical habitats and watersheds throughout the state by 2010.

Objective 3: conserve sensitive species to prevent them from becoming listed as threatened or endangered.

Constituency Goal: Achieve broad-based support for Division programs and budgets by demonstrating the value of wildlife to all citizens of Utah.

Objective 2: improve communication with wildlife organizations, public officials, private landowners, and government agencies to obtain support for Division programs.

Uinta National Forest 2003 Land and Resource Management Plan

FW-Goal-1 Soil, air, and water resources provide for watershed health, public health and safety, long-term soil productivity, and ecosystem sustainability, and meet applicable laws and regulations.

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FW-Goal-2 Biologically diverse, sustainable ecosystems maintain or enhance habitats for native flora and fauna, forest and rangeland health, watershed health, and water quality.

Sub-goal-2-1(G-2-1) The fuel management aspect of the fire management program is emphasized through application of hazard reduction activities.

Sub-goal-2-8(G-2-8) Ecosystem resilience is maintained by providing for a full range of seral stages and age classes (by cover type) that achieve a mosaic of habitat conditions and diversity to meet a variety of desired resource management objectives. Recruitment and sustainability of some early seral species and vegetation communities in the landscape are necessary to maintain ecosystem resilience to perturbations.

Sub-goal-2-10(G-2-10) Management actions maintain ecosystem health and encourage conditions that are within the historic range of variation. Management actions remain within the variability of size, intensity, and frequency of native disturbance regimes characteristic of the subject landscape and ecological processes.

Sub-goal-2-11(G-2-11) Key shrubs and/or trees are maintained to a level that allows adequate recruitment to maintain or recover the woody component. Specifically, the Forest is managed for more plants in the combined sprout and young categories than in the combined mature and dead categories.

Sub-goal-2-23(G-2-23) Areas identified as being of special concern for habitat such as big game winter range, big game natal areas, Canada lynx denning areas, and greater sage grouse breeding areas in the Vernon and Strawberry Reservoir Management Areas are maintained and, where potential exists, improved or expanded. Disturbances in these areas are limited during critical periods for wildlife.

Sub-goal-2-24(G-2-24) Adequate amounts and distribution of big game hiding and thermal cover are maintained. Adequate amounts of hiding cover for wildlife is retained around created openings and along roads where vegetative management activities are implemented.

Sub-goal-2-25(G-2-25) Maintain stable and upward conditions in big game winter range habitats and improve downward trend sites.

Objective-2-5(O-2-5) By 2013, accomplish at least 30,000 acres of vegetative treatments (combined total for all purposes).

Objective-2-17(O-2-17) By 2018, complete 1,000 acres of big game winter range habitat improvements to reach desired future conditions.

Sub-goal-8-4(G-8-4) Non-beneficial and/or unauthorized roads and trails are decommissioned, obliterated, or rehabilitated if they do not meet resource objectives or provide necessary access to facilities or inholdings.

Potential Risks: Increase in noxious weeds. Failure of seeding.

Proposed Methods: Utilize a 24 ft Dixie harrow to treat approximately 1,000 acres of the 2,500 acre treatment area to create openings in the thick sagebrush stand. One-way and two-way harrow treatments will be utilized. A combination of grass, forb and shrub seed will be broadcast between harrow passes.

Shapefile Name: HPD2009\GIS Proposals\CR\659.shp

Seed Source: GBRC

UPCD Reg Team Coord Date: 11/13/2007

**Proposed
NEPA Action:**

**Proposed
Arch Action:**

☒ **Vegetation Monitoring** ☐ **Wildlife Monitoring**

Monitoring Information: A Range Trend study will be established on the project area. Additional photo points will also be established. Sage grouse monitoring will be done by USU prior to and after treatment.

**Grazing
Management:**

SPECIES BENEFITING

Mule Deer	Greater Sage-grouse	Neotropical Birds	Burrowing Owl
Sage Sparrow	Sage Thrasher		

LAND OWNERSHIP

Owner	Acres
USFS	1000
Total	1000

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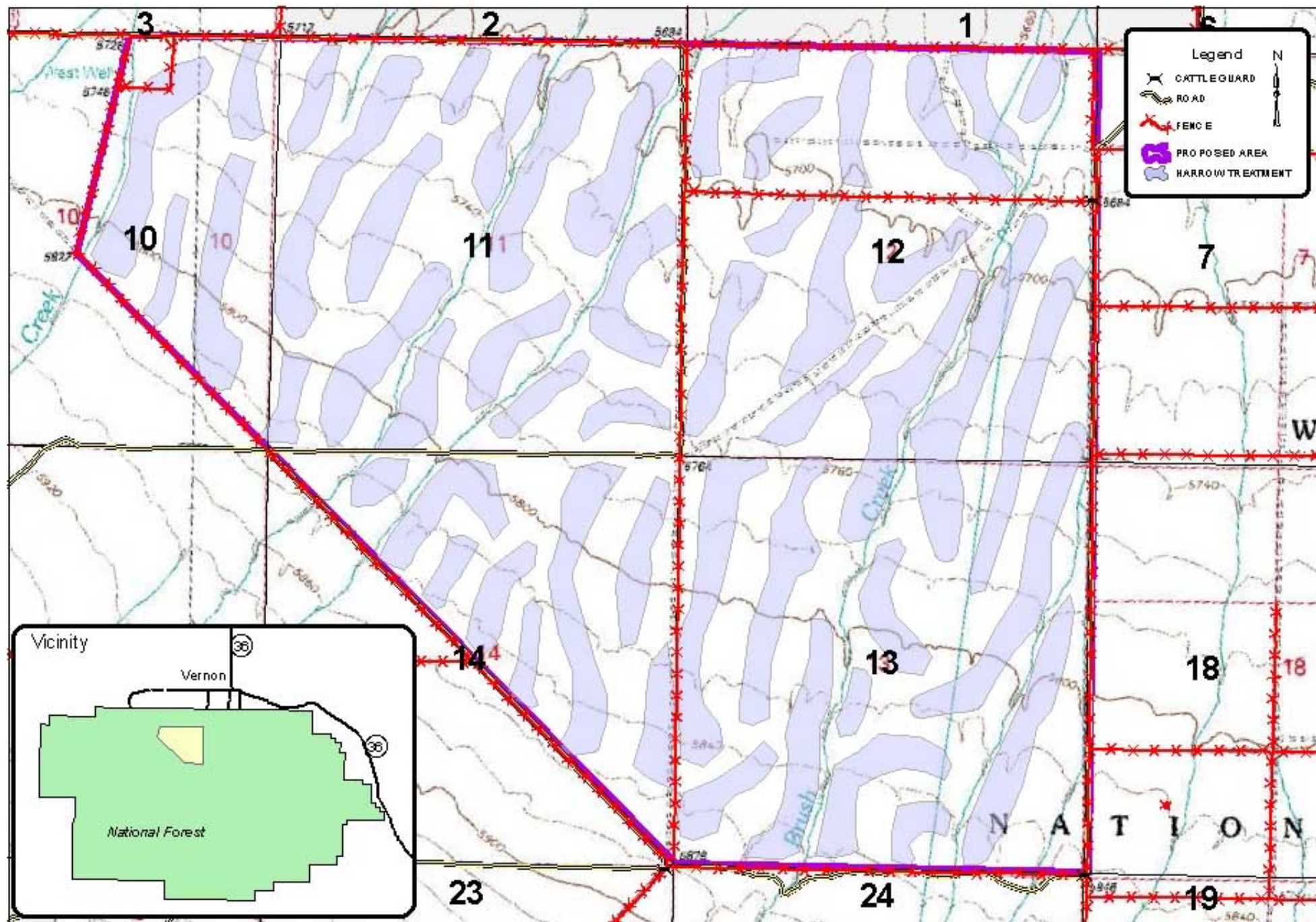
PROPOSED FUNDING

Source	Amount Requested	Date Approved	Amount Approved
USFS	\$25,000.00		\$0.00
ESMF Sage-grouse	\$120,500.00		\$0.00
Totals	\$145,500.00		\$0.00

PROPOSED BUDGET

Item	Description	DWR Account	In Kind/ Partner Contrib.
Contractual Services	Harrowing 1,000 acres @ \$60/acre	\$60,000.00	\$0.00
Other	Loading and unloading harrow	\$500.00	\$0.00
Seed (GBRC)	1000 acres of seed @ \$60/acre	\$60,000.00	\$0.00
NEPA	NEPA costs on 1,000 acres plus ARC clearance	\$0.00	\$25,000.00
Totals		\$120,500.00	\$25,000.00

Project Map:



Proposed Diagonal/Electric Sagebrush Improvement

Lana Starnal September 24, 2007



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Utah National
Forest

Spanish Fork,
Utah

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles



Utah Division of
Wildlife Resources

Springville,
Utah